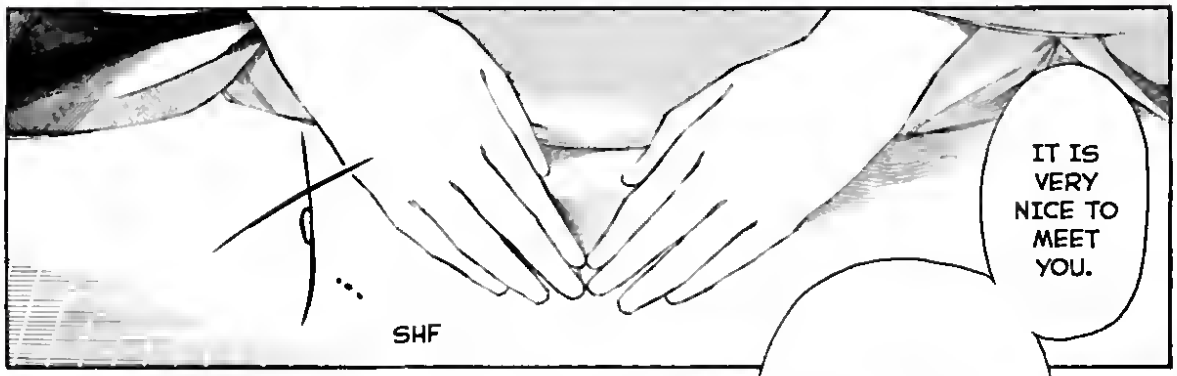
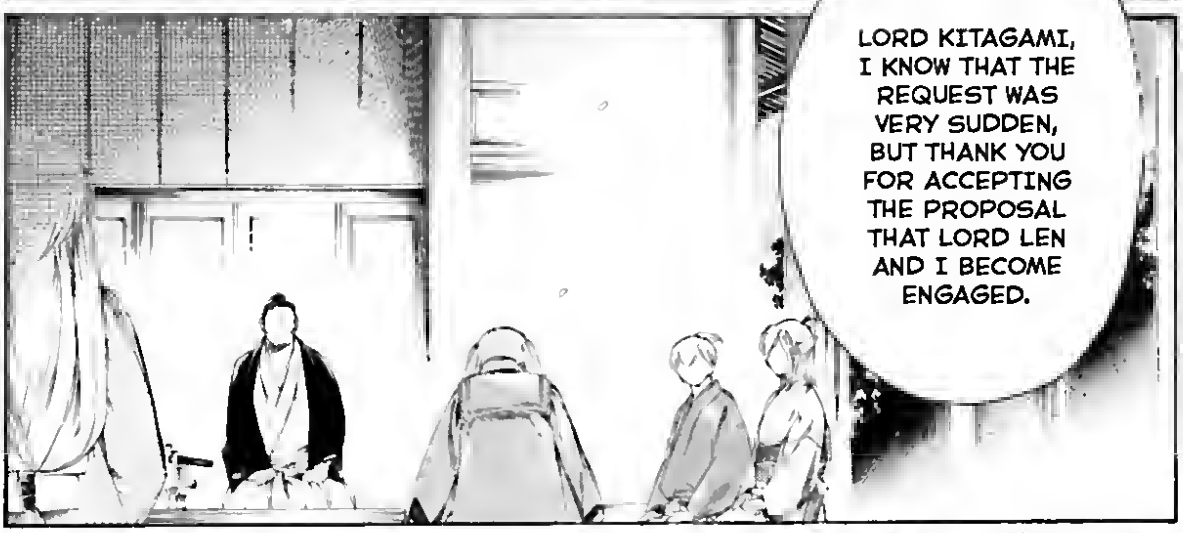
HER BELOVED LEN IS ENGAGED TO THIS GIRL, MIKU. HOW DOES RIN'S HEART FEEL ABOUT THIS...?



The Fox's Wedding
狐ノ嫁入り

CHAPTER 3

ORIGINAL CONCEPT: OSTER PROJECT
CHARACTER CONCEPT: CHIHO
MANGA: YUUKO SATOU


LORD KITAGAMI, I KNOW THAT THE REQUEST WAS VERY SUDDEN, BUT THANK YOU FOR ACCEPTING THE PROPOSAL THAT LORD LEN AND I BECOME ENGAGED.

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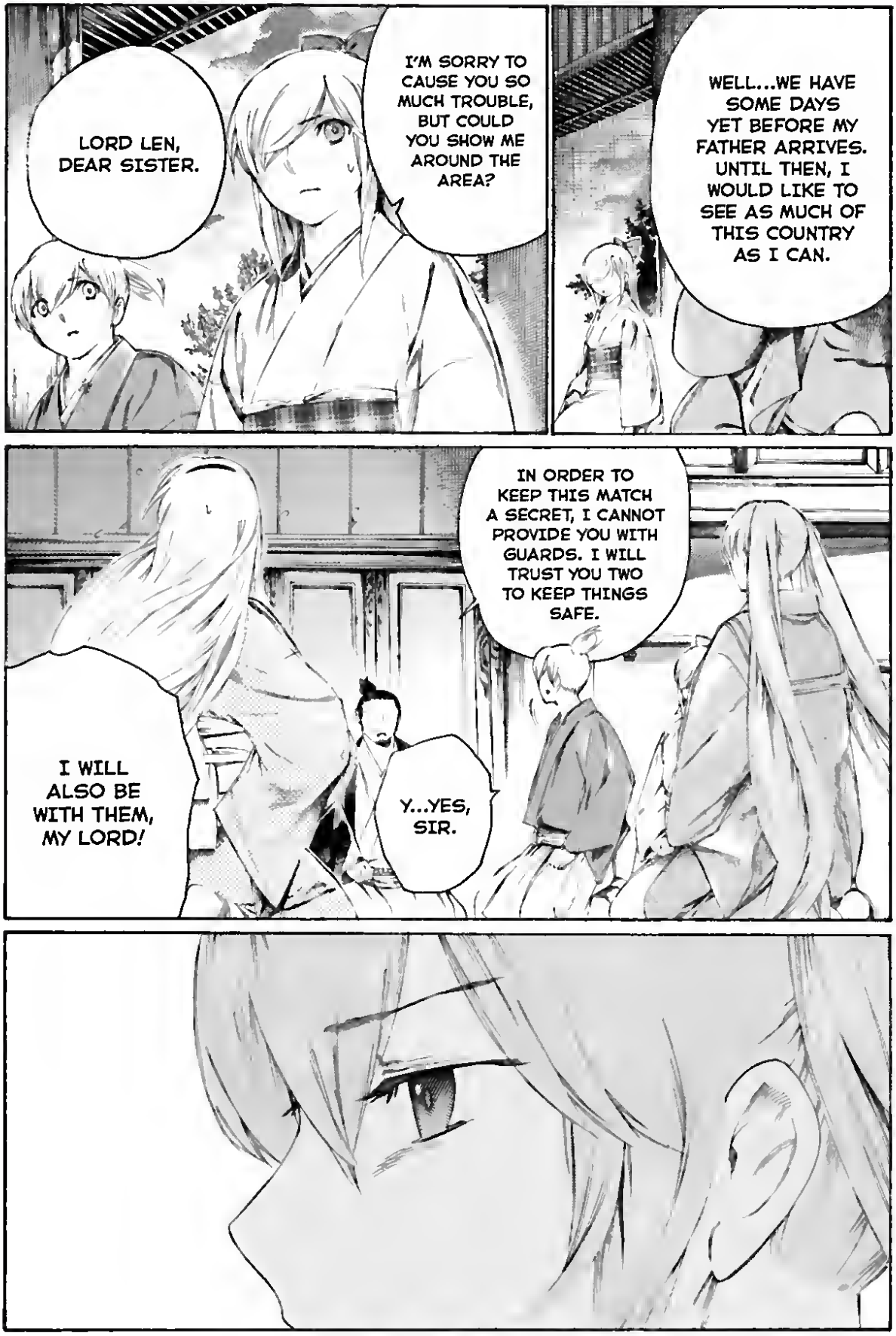
WE SHOULD BE THE ONES GIVING THANKS TO YOU.
THIS MATCH IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF THE KINDNESS THAT LORD KAIDOU HAS SHOWN TO EVERYONE IN OWARI THROUGH HIS AID.
LADY MIKU, PLEASE, YOU NEED NOT BOW YOUR HEAD.
I'M TERRIBLY HONORED BY YOUR THANKS, *DEAR UNCLE.*
GMPH

No SHINE
OH, YES! LORD LEN, YOU UNDERSTAND ME SO WELL!
SMILE
L-LADY MIKU?!
HAHA... PLEASE, UNCLE, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE'VE HAD A CHANCE TO MEET AND SPEAK WITH ONE ANOTHER, COULD WE DISPENSE WITH THE FORMALTIES?
I'M SURE LADY MIKU FEELS THE SAME WAY.
MATTERS OF STATE WOULD BE BEST DISCUSSED WITH MY FATHER, LORD KAIDOU, WHEN HE ARRIVES.

...AS WELL AS LORD LEN.
I HAVE COME TO SEE MUSA-SHI...

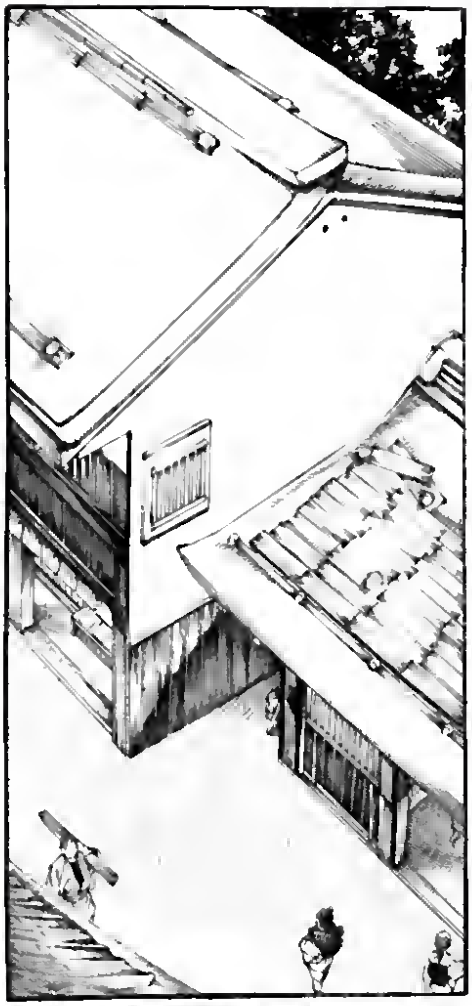
HIS SURROUNDINGS, HIS FAMILY... I WOULD LIKE TO LEARN ABOUT EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM.
THIS IS THE COUNTRY WHERE LORD LEN WAS RAISED, FROM WHICH HIS HEROIC EXPLOITS HAVE CIRCULATED EVEN IN DISTANT NATIONS...
I WOULD LIKE TO GET TO KNOW MY KIND ELDER SISTER.
IN ADDITION...
JUST WHAT I SAID.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
.....


LORD LEN, DEAR SISTER.
I'M SORRY TO CAUSE YOU SO MUCH TROUBLE, BUT COULD YOU SHOW ME AROUND THE AREA?
WELL...WE HAVE SOME DAYS YET BEFORE MY FATHER ARRIVES. UNTIL THEN, I WOULD LIKE TO SEE AS MUCH OF THIS COUNTRY AS I CAN.
IN ORDER TO KEEP THIS MATCH A SECRET, I CANNOT PROVIDE YOU WITH GUARDS. I WILL TRUST YOU TWO TO KEEP THINGS SAFE.
I WILL ALSO BE WITH THEM, MY LORD!
Y...YES, SIR.

BY THE WAY, LORD LEN.
YES?
THERE IS BLOOD ON YOUR KIMONO...
...MIGHT YOU BE INJURED?
...!
FWAP

I WILL GO CHANGE!
PASH
I...M-MUST HAVE BEEN BITTEN BY A MOSQUITO!
JUMP

HA HA... HE IS EVEN LOVED BY MOSQUI-TOES.
LORD LEN MUST NOT BE UNDERES-TIMATED...
YES... HE IS THE PRIDE OF HIS FAMILY...
HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE
BEK
?



UNDER LORD KITAGAMI'S RULE, THE CITIZENS ARE SAFE AND WELL ATTENDED TO.
IT'S A QUIET PLACE, AND LOVELY.
PARENTS WITH SMALL CHILDREN ARE PARTICULARLY AFRAID OF A WAR THAT MAY COME AT ANY TIME.
BUT SINCE MY FATHER'S DEATH, MY UNCLE'S RULE HAS CAUSED MORE AND MORE PEOPLE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY.
AH... I WOULD LIKE TO AGREE WITH YOU...
"THE PEOPLE MUST BE FREE." ...IS A POLICY THAT HAS BEEN IN EFFECT SINCE MY FATHER'S TIME.
THERE IS NAUGHT WE CAN DO TO KEEP THOSE WHO WANT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY FROM DOING SO.

TO ABANDON ONE'S HOME-TOWN...
...BECAUSE THEY CANNOT TRUST THE LEADER OF THEIR COUNTRY... I BELIEVE I DO NOT MIND THAT...

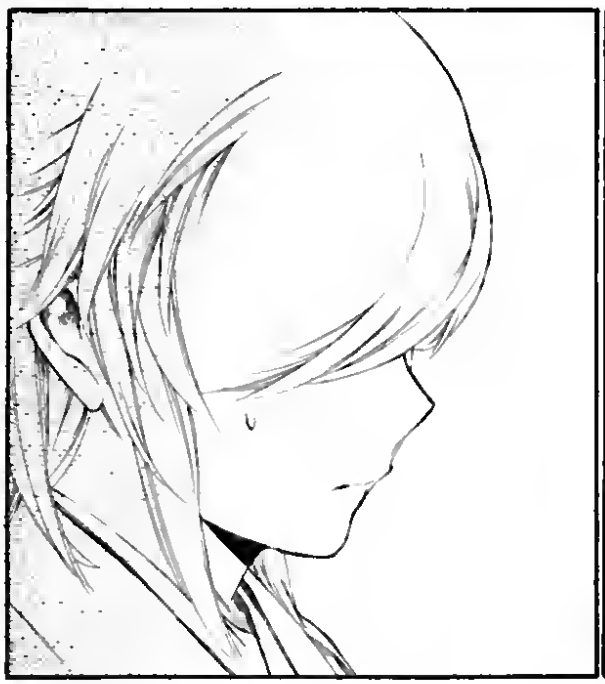
MY APOLO-GIES...
...EVEN SO, DESPITE LORD KITAGAMI BEING LOVED BY HIS PEOPLE, MY FATHER, KAIDOU, WAS CONCERNED FOR HIM DAILY.
PHEW

IT IS TRUE THAT AMONG THE MANY MARTIAL RULERS OF THIS LAND OF THE RISING SUN, MY FATHER, WHOSE PRIMARY CONCERN WAS FOR THE PEOPLE, WAS CONSIDERED STRANGE.
LORD KAIDOU WAS SO CONCERNED ABOUT MY FATHER'S RULE?
THE LAND THAT LORD KITAGAMI ONCE PROTECTED, AND THOSE WHO STILL LIVE ON IT...
YET... WHAT DO YOU THINK OF IT, LORD LEN?
...I CANNOT DISLIKE EITHER OF THEM.

GRIP
ARE YOU LOST?
OH, WHAT IS WRONG WITH THAT CHILD?
SHF

A MOUNTAIN FOX AND A POOR GIRL...
THAT... SONG...
LOST, LOST IN THE MOUNTAINS... THE LAMENTING MELODY IS THE VOICE OF A FOX...
THE PEOPLE CRY WHEN SHE DOES NOT RETURN HOME...

THE FOX CRIES WHEN THE MAN MISSES HER...
A SOUL PLAYING HIDE-AND-GO-SEEK WITH A FOX...



MY BOY!
DASH
MY--
ほよ…
OHHH…

THAT CHILDREN'S SONG IS...
YES, IT IS ONE I'VE KNOWN SINCE MY CHILDHOOD.
THAT SONG, YESTER-DAY...
...YES, IT DEFINITELY IS A SONG FROM THIS COUNTRY OF MUSASHI.
OH... IS IT?

I DO NOT REMEMBER WHO I LEARNED THE SONG FROM...
BUT I DO REMEMBER HEARING IT WAS ONE THAT COMES FROM THE TRADITION OF MUSASHI.
SO WHY DO YOU KNOW IT, DESPITE LIVING IN OWARI, LADY MIKU?
.....

I WONDER THAT MYSELF.
WHY INDEED?
...?
おろ
SHIVER

LUKA, PLEASE GO INTO MY THINGS IN MY ROOM AND GET THE LETTER FOR LORD KITAGAMI QUICKLY...
A LETTER FROM LORD KAIDOU? IT MAY CONCERN SOMETHING IMPORTANT REGARDING THE COUNTRY'S RULE.
Y-YES, MILADY!
OH DEAR!
MY FATHER GAVE ME A LETTER I WAS TOLD TO TURN OVER TO LORD KITAGAMI.
IT IS FINE. THE MANSION IS VERY NEAR, AND WE WILL RETURN QUICKLY. LORD LEN, YOU SHOULD GO AHEAD WITH LUKA.
BUT!
?
I HAVE SOMETHING TO SPEAK TO YOU ABOUT, SISTER.

LADY MIKU?
SWIP

AH... LADY... MIKU...? WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO SPEAK TO ME ABOUT?
WE MUST RETURN AND PRESENT LORD KAIDOU'S LETTER--
THAT WAS A LIE.
EH?
I CAME HERE TO MUSASHI UNDER MY FATHER'S OBJEC-TIONS.
HE WOULD NOT SEND WITH ME A LETTER ABOUT THE KINGDOM'S RULE IN THAT CASE.
IT CAN'T BE!
WHY DID YOU TELL SUCH A LIE?

TO GET THIS CHANCE TO SPEAK WITH YOU, SISTER.
.....

PLEASE CALM YOUR-SELF, SISTER.
I WILL APOLOGIZE TO LORD LEN AND LUKA LATER.
WHAT IS IT THAT YOU WANT?
FWISH
I BELIEVE THEY WILL BE CONCERNED, BUT I WOULD LIKE TO CLEAR THE AIR QUICKLY.
.....

THE GRAVE WE SAW YESTERDAY...
...WHOSE WAS IT?

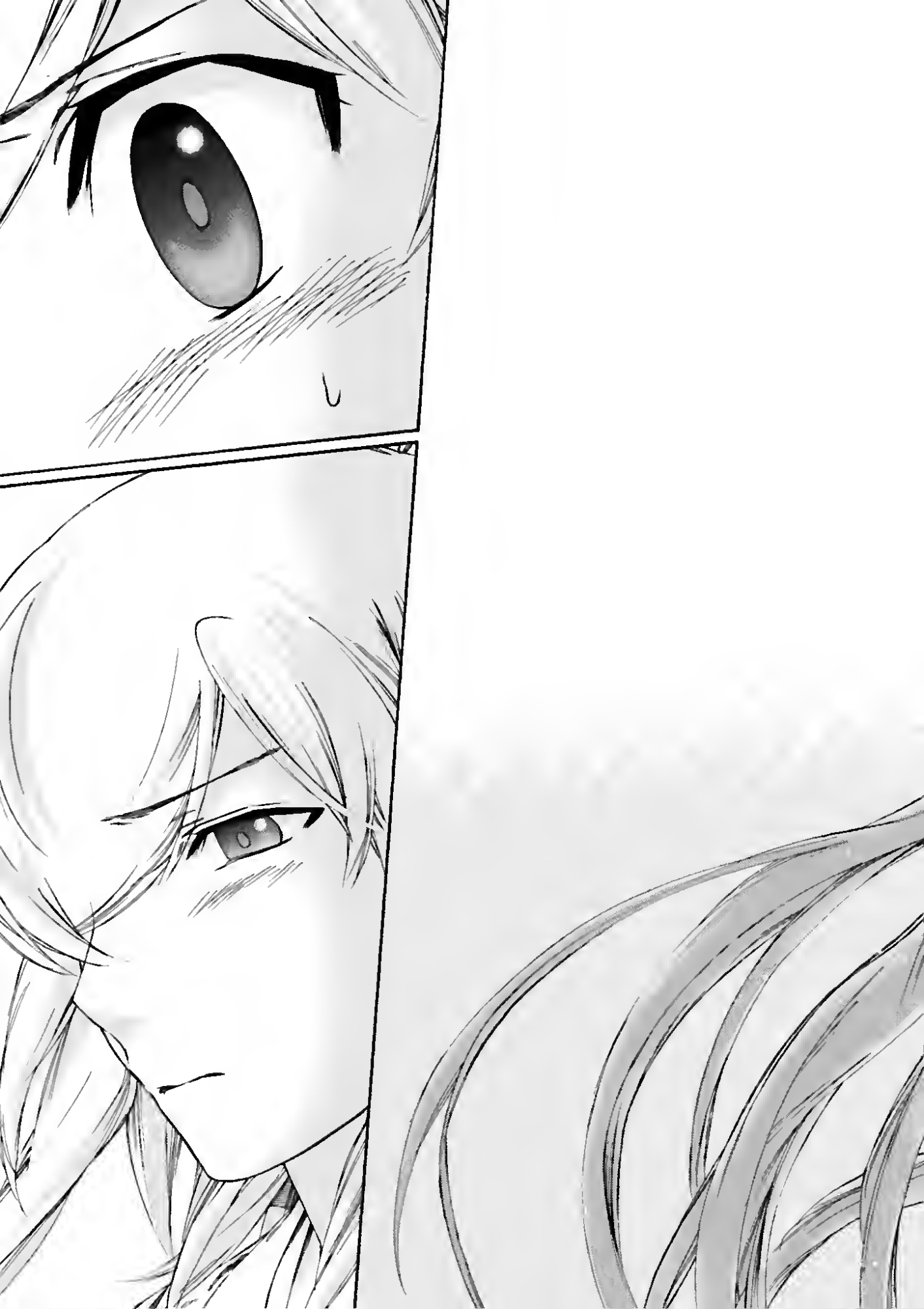
HATSU-NE?
IT WAS...
HATSU-NE'S.
OUR CHILDHOOD FRIEND.
WHEN WE WERE SIX YEARS OLD, SHE PASSED AWAY.
.....

AT THE MOUNTAIN WHERE HER GRAVESITE IS...
...SHE WAS "SPIRITED AWAY."

WHAT OF YOU TWO AT THAT TIME?
WE WERE TOLD THAT SIX MONTHS LATER, THE BODY OF AN UNIDENTIFIABLE YOUNG GIRL WAS FOUND IN THE DEPTHS OF THE MOUNTAIN...
BUT WE WERE LUCKY, AND WE WERE FOUND.
WE, TOO, WERE "SPIRITED AWAY."
AND THAT WAS HATSUNE...?

LADY MIKU... MAY I STOP? I DO NOT WISH TO REMEMBER.
WE ARE NOT SURE WHAT HAPPENED THEN...
YES... THOUGH LEN AND I ARE UNABLE TO CONFIRM OUR MEMORIES.
YES... I AM TERRIBLY SORRY.
BUT... I HAVE ONE MORE QUESTION.

DEAR SISTER... ARE YOU IN LOVE WITH LORD LEN?



PLIP
PLIP
AH YES, RAIN FALL-ING THOUGH THERE IS NOT A CLOUD IN THE SKY. THAT IS WHAT THIS WEATHER IS CALLED, RIGHT?
"THE FOX'S WEDDING."

AND THERE, DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS, THE LIGHTS OF THE WEDDING PROCESSION CAN BE SEEN...

THOSE ARE...
...NOT LIGHTS OF CELEBRATION, THOUGH.

SISTER!
THAT MAY BE AN INVA-SION FROM A NEIGHBORING COUNTRY!
SHOOF
?!